Southwest Virginia Telemedicine Project (June 1, 2005)

Troutdale, Virginia

Today, I am pleased to visit Troutdale for the purpose of celebrating the establishment of a new telemedicine site at the Troutdale Medical Center which serves Grayson County residents.

For the past several years, I have encouraged community health clinics, health departments and local hospitals throughout the Ninth Congressional District to establish telemedicine sites connected to the University of Virginia's Hospital in Charlottesville and have worked closely with these facilities in requesting and obtaining hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal funding to support the telemedicine projects. Our work has been highly successful, and Southwest Virginia now boasts more than 50 broadband-connected telemedicine sites, more than any other Congressional District in the nation.

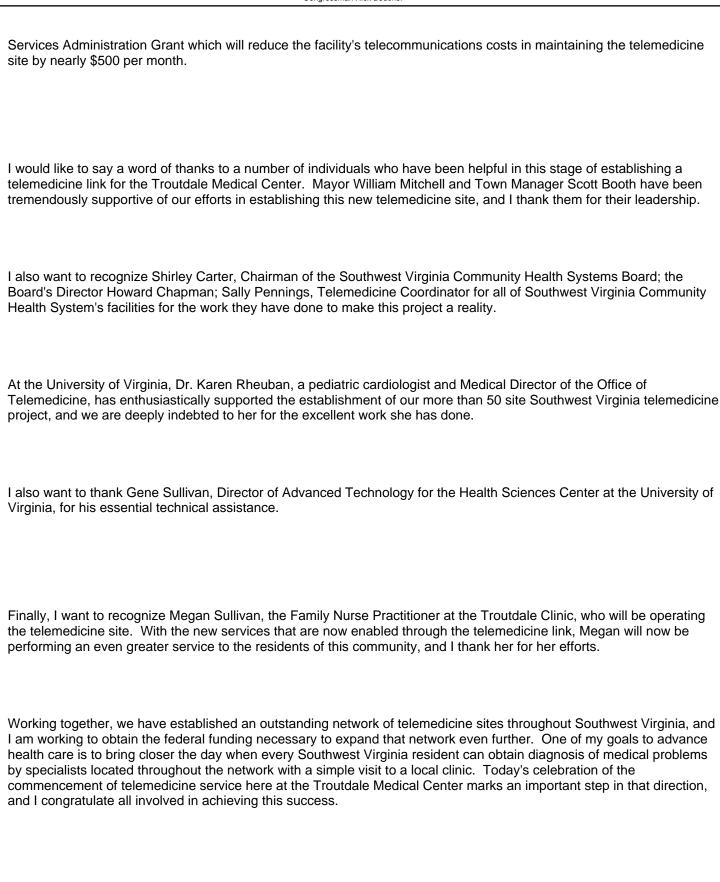
Telemedicine provides a means of obtaining diagnostic services and other forms of specialized care for patients in rural settings without the necessity of having to travel long distances to teaching hospitals and other centers which provide specialized medical care. Through advances in telecommunications technology, medical images, including X-rays, lab slides, CAT scans and magnetic resonance images can be transmitted across the telecommunications network. The specialized medical center receives the image with the same clarity that is contained in the original, and the specialist can render an opinion with the same degree of certainty as if he were viewing the original image.

This advance is tremendously beneficial for patients in rural settings who can avoid the time and expense associated with travel to the distant medical center. The patient can simply go to a clinic in his hometown that has telemedicine capability, and while he stays in the local examining room, the specialist located hundreds of miles away can do the examination and render a diagnosis. Telemedicine opens a new era of medical diagnosis and treatment which has previously been unavailable for many rural residents.

The telemedicine connection which has been established here at the clinic in Troutdale was made possible through a federal Community Development Block Grant in the amount of \$28,050. The grant funds have been administered through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development and have been used to purchase and install a new computer, video conferencing equipment, television with VCR, monitor, electronic stethoscope, an ELMO document camera and a hand held digital camera for clinical imaging. The telemedicine connection with UVA's Hospital in Charlottesville is being provided through a high-speed T-1 data line.

In addition to receiving federal funds for the establishment of the telemedicine site, the Troutdale Medical Center will also benefit from federally mandated reduced telecommunications rates which are necessary for the Internet connection that enables the telemedicine link. At my urging, the Federal Communications Commission recently modified its rules regarding the Rural Health Care Support Mechanism program, a federal program which allows rural healthcare facilities to receive reduced rates for high-speed Internet connections and other broadband telecommunications services through the Universal Service Fund. As a result of the rule modification, the Troutdale Clinic will receive a federal Universal

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